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COAL MINISTRY ORGAN ATTACKED

(Review of Ugol' (Coal), monthly scientific and technical organ of the Ministry of Coal Industry USSR, No 1 - 12, 1948, and 1 - 3, 1949)

M. Kundin and M. Shadrin

The coal industry supplies 75 percent of all fuel used in the Soviet Union. All the necessary machines and equipment for full mechanization of coal mines are now available. However, the speed of mining operations and the productivity of labor are still very low in the developed workings.

To accelerate mining operations and to increase the productivity of labor, three conditions must be met: proper equipment must be selected for each stop; labor must be rationally organized; mine trolleys must be run up to the steps.

The periodical 'Ugol', the organ of the coal industry, has recognized the seriousness of this problem. Out of a total of 128 articles published in the periodical in 1948, 29 were devoted to operations and improvements in developed mine workings. Thirty eight articles took up the problems of mechanization of labor and introduction of new techniques, and 19 articles, the problems of safety and ventilation in mines. In addition there were articles on coal concentration, mine construction, geological and mining surveys, and the use of machines and equipment.

An important defect in most of the articles in Ugol' is the absence of analyses of the economic problems involved in the operation of various machines. As a result, it is impossible to judge the economic efficiency of the machines or the methods of mechanization and processing suggested or cited by the authors of the articles.

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For example, in their article "First Results of the Use of Soviet Coal Planes," Comrades Yatskiy and Sov do not pay sufficient attention to the economic indices of the work of these coal planes. They barely mention labor productivity, merely stating that it was much higher for the same coal beds when coal planes rather than cutting machines were used.

In an article on metal props in mine drifts, Comrades Buzikov and Kolodub do not present data and conclusions on the advantages of these props, or on labor productivity and lowering the cost of coal as a result of their use. A reduction in consumption of wood for shoring, for which there is a yearly demand in our coal industry of millions of cubic meters of wood, is a serious matter in our national economy. The authors of the article, and the editors of Ugol', refer indifferently to the problems of productivity of labor engaged in shoring work, to the problems of cost, and to other economic problems.

Comrade Mokrousov is one of the few authors to touch upon economic problems in coal technology. In his article "Use of Hydraulic Pressure in Open Workings in the Coal Industry," he indicates the advantages of hydraulic pressure over excavating and other methods of coal extraction in open workings. The hydraulic pressure method, which in 1943 had excavated 3.42 percent of all coal obtained from open workings, by 1947 was excavating 10.1 percent of all open workings coal. This method increases labor productivity two or three times and lowers costs 20 - 30 percent.

Analyzing the reasons for a 30-percent decrease in wood consumption for every 1,000 tons of coal extracted in the eastern coal regions in 1947 as compared to 1940, Comrade Chermashentsev, in his article "Economic Use of Wood Results in Orderly Supply," points out that this economy was the result of the use of shields, air chambers, and other methods in the workings, which lowered the demand for wood. Although these methods resulted in increased output of coal, higher labor productivity, and less wood consumption, they caused great loss in the available amount of coal and increased the possibility of subterranean fires.

Detailed articles, which deal with economic problems along with technical production, are very rare in Ugol'. Most of the articles published in Ugol' are technical. For example, in 1948 there was not even one article on such important economic problems as lowering the production cost of coal, acceleration of capital turnover, planning of production, or statistics and accounting procedures in the coal industry. A lack of recognition of the coal industry's basic economic problems by its organ Ugol' creates an abnormal condition. By its omissions the periodical Ugol' lowers its value to the coal industry.

In the first three issues of 1949 the editors continue to undervalue the economic problems of the coal industry.

The workers of the coal industry joined other Soviet workers in the drive for higher profits in every enterprise, for overfulfillment of their plan, for acceleration of capital turnover, for lowering the cost price of products and for increased labor productivity. As a result, in 1948 they successfully fulfilled the plan and at the same time lowered the cost price of coal. Likewise, cost accounting procedures were widely adopted by the coal industry.

Despite all this patriotic activity, Ugol' limited itself to a general indication of the importance of these problems in a few scattered lead articles.

The coal industry has been equipped with new techniques which require that special attention be given to the problems of labor organization, of the establishment of technically sound production norms, and of the use of chronometric methods to increase labor productivity. These problems, along with the introduction of the two-shift system in coal mining, (the third shift to do repair and auxiliary work) should be given wide coverage in Ugol'.

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However, despite the great importance of these problems for the coal industry, Ugol' gives little space to the experiences of mines under the two-shift system; and there are no articles on labor norms, chronometric and research work, improvement in labor organization, and planning of production.

These omissions are all the more inadmissible since the work of scientific research institutes of the coal industry (All-Union Coal Institute in Moscow, Scientific Research Institute in Stalino, etc.) which have experienced specialists working on these problems, unfortunately, often remains unknown to the majority of engineers and technicians, especially those working in the mines, because of a lack of publicity.

In 1947 and 1948, mean progressive norms were established for linear progress in the stopes and for productivity of cutting machines. Although many brigades and sections have exceeded the established mean progressive norms, in many mines linear progress in the stopes and productivity of cutting machines are still significantly lower than the established norms. This condition is the result of poor labor organizations in the stopes and considerable loss of time by men and machines because of late delivery by mine trolleys and slow preparation of work places.

Although rapid completion of work cycles has been achieved in individual sections and mines, in most sections the work cycles continue for 2 - 3 days, thus lowering the rate of extraction of coal from the stopes and of labor productivity.

In Ugol', the means by which progressive brigades and individual Stakhanovites have attained high indices are not discussed; the achievements of the best section chiefs who rapidly complete their work cycles in the stopes and attain high rates of linear progress in developed workings are not analyzed.

Labor turnover is a very serious problem in the coal industry, even though it is not as bad as it was during the prewar period. Labor turnover is especially unfortunate during the present reequipment of coal mines since it hinders satisfactory utilization of new techniques and machines.

In accordance with the postwar Five-Year Plan, factory and plant training schools (FZO) have been established in coal regions to guarantee the coal industry a qualified labor force. Trade schools also furnish skilled young workers. In addition, workers are given individual, brigade, and course instruction at the mines.

Construction of suitable living quarters in coal regions will help to keep workers at their jobs.

Quite abnormally, Ugol' virtually ignores the problem of labor turnover. It devotes only one insignificant article, "Qualified Workers for New Machines" by Comrade Gneushev, on the establishment of course in rock- and coal-crushing machines, to this very serious problem.

The editors do not give sufficient attention to the problems of capital investment and particularly of restoration of the Donets Basin.

Soviet mining engineers have made great achievements in the mechanization and organization of construction work. Many new highly efficient machines have begun work on mine construction.

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However, Ugol' neither acquaints its readers with the great work of engineers, planners, and constructors, nor generalizes experiences in the solution of technical and economic problems in construction and restoration of mines. During the first 11 months of 1948 there were virtually no articles in Ugol' on the problem of mine construction and restoration in the Donbass. Good articles on this subject did not appear until the December issue of the periodical.

Ugol' does not give sufficient attention to current problems of the coal industry in regard to the quality and concentration of coal. With the exception of an article by Professor Verkhovskiy on "Means of Using Coal Tailings in Coal-Concentration Plants," all the articles on briquetting and coal concentrating are general and theoretical. The editors obviously do not value practical problems in the work of briquetting and coal-concentration plants, in the construction of these plants, and in their achievements and shortcomings.

Problems in coal concentration do not exhaust all the problems on the quality of coal. The quality of coal depends on its screening, on its storage, on proper use of explosives, on the props, etc. However, Ugol' pays no attention to any of these matters.

Ugol' fails to indicate the progressive role of Soviet teachers, engineers, and technicians in the solution of the basic problems of the coal industry. It fails to note that the Soviet Union was first to use industrially subterranean gasification of coal, shields for digging coal in very steep beds, mine combines, cutting and loading machines, new conveyers, and other equipment.

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